

◆ *A Real-Time Experience with Online Databases*

Speakers:

Christine A Arturo
Leitmotif Group
San Francisco, California

Julie Steffen
The University of Chicago Press
Chicago, Illinois

Dana L St John
Cancer
Houston, Texas

Reporter:

Suzanne P Smith
*The Journal of Nursing Administration
and Nurse Educator*
Bradenton, Florida

How does one select a Web-based database for manuscript tracking and peer review? What are the advantages and disadvantages of choosing a commercially available product over a custom-developed system?

Christine A Arturo cited advantages of a Web-based system: It reduces review time, time to decision, and in-press time; it avoids loss of material by moving PDFs through the review and publication process; and it saves money on fax, mail, and express couriers. To select a system, she suggests using a matrix to rate desired system features and their importance to the purchaser. Some common criteria are functionality (ease and intuitiveness of logon procedures, Web interface, and ease of use for reviewers, authors, and editorial office staff), utility of and ability to customize reports, unique features (reference linking and easy, intuitive screens and prompts), system-integration factors (hosting, data conversion, hardware, software, and version-upgrade scheduling options), vendor proposal options (license-purchase options, customer support, delivery and

implementation timeframe, and training program), and desirability and reliability of the vendor as a business partner.

Julie Steffen, representing one of the largest university presses, which manages about 50 journals and a distribution center for 23 other nonprofit publishers, discussed her organization's history of in-house peer-review databases, SMGL-based electronic publishing, and Web-based peer review. In 2001, the organization's staff assessed the value of continuing to build its in-house Web-based peer-review system rather than buying a commercially available product. Desiring extensibility and flexibility for the array of disciplines it served, the ability to leverage existing technologies and staff, affordability, experience with an unreliable vendor, and a competitive market study recommended that the organization continue to build its in-house system. Benefits of an internally developed Web-based peer-review system include the ability to customize features to a particular journal's peer-review practices and policies, to develop and control the implementation and training schedule, to ensure security and access control, and to provide reliable customer support.

Dana L St John discussed the commercially developed Web-based manuscript-tracking and peer-review system, Cadmus's Rapid Review, used for the journal *Cancer*. Potential cost savings and faster arrival to decision time were driving factors in buying a system when the journal relocated from New Jersey to Texas in 2001. St John mentioned that Federal Express costs exceeded \$100,000 at *Circulation*, where she was managing editor from 1993 to 2001. After reinforcing Arturo's assessment factors, St John reviewed issues related to planning, such as setting a realistic timeline and goals, estimating costs, involving key stakeholders to

anticipate concerns and issues, and user training. Implementation issues included introducing the system and fostering buy-in and ownership by staff, editors, authors, and reviewers; choices that each journal office might make, including rollout of the system, roles for each staff member, decisions regarding uploading manuscripts, and what the office will require of authors, reviewers, and editors in the beginning and in the future; troubleshooting approaches; and continual reassessment of progress. In addition to staff content and technical expertise, implementation was facilitated by staff who demonstrated flexibility, patience, a sense of humor, an innovative and pioneering spirit, and creativity.

Two resources mentioned by the speakers for assisting others in gauging their readiness for a Web-based manuscript-tracking and peer-review system are the Sheridan Press white paper "Implementing Information Technology Systems" (www.sheridanpress.com/PDF_docs/PDF_Information_Technology_White_Paper.pdf) and the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition's list of 30 journal-management systems (www.arl.org/sparc/core/index.asp?page=h16).

In summary, after hearing the pros and cons of the approaches and systems discussed by the speakers and being the user of a Web-based system, I feel that for successfully selecting, implementing, and maintaining any system it is critical to have extensive preliminary fact-finding, to have several repeat vendor demonstrations of the system to key stakeholders, to establish a dedicated task force (composed, at a minimum, of a representative of every stakeholder group that will use the system) to manage the entire process, to ensure adequate and continuing user training and support, and to evaluate system utility and functionality regularly. 🗣️